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ABSTRACT

A study conducted in 1976 surveyed 742 faculty members from 65 colleges and schools of business in universities throughout the United States on their views of the liberal arts components of the curriculum. The survey instrument was one used 18 years earlier, so that shifts in opinion could be noted. In general, the business faculty expressed opinions less favorable to liberal arts in 1976 than in 1958. They were more likely to agree with statements favorable to liberal education. There was a marked tendency to prefer that a smaller portion of the business curriculum be devoted to liberal studies. More than one fourth of the 1976 respondents preferred that 25 percent or less of the curriculum be devoted to the liberal arts. Business faculty attributed to their administrators and fellow faculty members attitudes less favorable than their own toward the liberal arts. Business faculty were reluctant to require their students to take work in any of the particular branches of the liberal arts except those having particular relevance to the business curriculum. Thus 85 percent or more would require economics, mathematics, and composition but as many as half of the faculty would require no other subject. Responses are summarized in tables. (Author/MSE)

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THE LIBERAL ARTS AS VIEWED BY FACULTY MEMBERS IN
COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS: 1958-1976

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According to the AACBS accreditation standards, the purpose of the curriculum is to provide for a broad education preparing the student for imaginative and responsible citizenship and leadership roles in business and society--domestic and worldwide. This statement and related guidelines clearly express the sense of the AACSB membership that those who determine what must be studied in the process of earning a bachelor's degree in business have the responsibility for the general education of business students as well as for their technical education. Obviously, in discharging curriculum building and maintenance responsibilities, business faculty members (hereafter referred to as BFM) must make judgments about courses in studies other than business. The data presented in this article provide some insights into the attitudes and preferences of BFM which may influence the kind of judgments BFM make in determining the nonbusiness component of curricula in business and how these attitudes and preferences have changed since 1958.

In 1976, 742 BFM from 65 colleges and schools of business from all regions of the United States responded to an 87-item survey instrument,

Insert Table 1 here

dealing with general attitudes toward the liberal arts; preferences as to the size, content, and organization of the liberal arts component; and perceptions concerning the attitudes of several categories of colleagues toward liberal studies. The 1976 survey was as nearly as possible identical to one conducted by McGrath in 1958. The items in the instrument were identical in content, sequence of items, and phraseology in both studies; and the deans of participating institutions cooperated in the distribution and collection of questionnaires. Both studies surveyed faculty in eight undergraduate professional curricula in addition to business, as shown in Table 1. The comparison of 1958 data with those of 1976 is somewhat weakened by the fact that it cannot be said that responding BFM represented the same institutions. Unfortunately, the report of the McGrath study did not say what institutions were surveyed and the original data have been discarded; therefore, the validity of the comparisons depends on the reader's judgment of the adequacy of the population sampled in the 1976 study.

General Attitudes toward Liberal Studies

The first 26 items on the survey instruments called for respondents to indicate agreement or disagreement with statements expressing attitudes toward liberal studies in general. Using responses to these statements, McGrath computed an "Index of Favorable Attitudes toward the Liberal Arts," which was the average number of the 26 items on which responses

were given indicating an attitude favorable to liberal studies.

Indices for the 1958 and 1976 studies as reported in Table 2 show a decline for eight of the nine professions studied. The two professions showing the greatest decline are business (2.61) and education (2.50).

Insert Table 2 here

While there appears to have been a general decline in attitudes favorable toward liberal studies, BFM are by no means inclined to dispense with their liberal arts components of their curricula. About 95% agreed that all students should be required to take some liberal arts courses. About 85% would apply this dictum to every professional curriculum and 80% to every posthigh school program. In these responses, BFM differ relatively little from faculty in the other eight professions--under 10 percentage points in 28 out of 32 comparisons on various attitude statements related to this point. On the other hand, about 80% of BFM expressed disagreement with a statement that a liberal arts degree should be a prerequisite for professional curricula. This was within 10 percentage points of the proportions of faculty in six other professions expressing this view. The exceptions were nursing and journalism where only 64% and 62% of the respondents disagreed. About 15% of the 1958 BFM assented to what would amount to dropping business as an undergraduate major compared with about 8% of the 1976 BFM. Similarly, only about 3% of the 1976 BFM agreed with this statement: Since many college-age youths are so strongly vocationally motivated, general and liberal education should be postponed and offered through adult education programs.

Only about 15% agreed with this somewhat less drastic statement: Bright technical and professional students will usually pick up during and after college sufficient liberal arts experience through outside reading, attending lectures, and the like. About twice this proportion of respondents from engineering and pharmacy agreed with this statement, but the response of BFM was within 7 percentage points of those of all other professions on both statements, about the same situation obtained in the 1958 study.

How much BFM actually value liberal studies can be inferred from responses to the first five survey items shown in Table 3. Eight percent or fewer agreed with statements that said that liberal and professional courses have the same purposes, that the values attributed to liberal arts courses are unattainable, and that including liberal arts and professional courses in the same program destroys the values of both. BFM responses were generally within two or three percentage points of those of the faculty of other professions, never more than seven. Similarly, only 15% of BFM agree that professional courses "planned with some attention to general education" could achieve as well or better the benefits claimed for liberal arts courses. Twice that proportion, however, believe that the best preparation for a professional is intensive specialization, including courses in directly related fields. Respondents from other fields differed from BFM by only a few percentage points.

Insert Table 3 here

What kind of values do BFM ascribe to liberal arts courses? The last three items in Table 3 relate to this question. About 63% of BFM

believe that liberal arts courses develop broad intellectual interests and humanitarian attitudes to a greater extent than professional courses do. About 56% agree that giving little attention to liberal arts would produce graduates "lacking in imagination, in broad perspectives, and in ability to see problems outside their own field." And 76% believe that future professional advancement will come more readily to persons who have received a broad liberal education as well as professional training.

The 1958 study reported data on responses to only two of the eight items dealt with in Table 3. It is interesting to note that in responding to these particular items, in every professional group but one a larger proportion agreed with the anti-liberal arts statements in 1976 than in 1958. Furthermore, in all nine professions, a smaller percentage of each professional group in 1976 agreed with the pro-liberal arts statements than in 1958.

Nature of the Liberal Arts Component
and the Time Devoted to It

Courses Preferred for Inclusion. Liberal arts courses that are most directly related to the conduct of business professions tend to attract "required" status from BFM, but for other liberal courses, BFM tend to prefer to leave it up to the student whether to enroll or not. As shown in Table 4, economics, mathematics, and English composition would be required by 85% or more BFM. No other subject would be required by as many as 50% of BFM. History, speech, and literature would be required by 40-46% of BFM in 1976; psychology, sociology, and political science by slightly more than one-fourth; and all the remaining nine fields by 15% or fewer. In the case of all subjects other than English, math, and economics, the proportion of BFM who would prefer optional status was greater in 1976 than in 1958, and the proportion who would prefer "required" status was

smaller. Considering the importance of oral communication in business, it is perhaps surprising that only 43% of 1976 BFM would require it of all majors. Similarly, less than 20% would even encourage, much less require, foreign languages.

Insert Table 4 here

Except for history and literature, none of the humanities was considered important enough in 1976 to be required by more than about one BFM in eight. The same was true of the natural sciences.

Proportion of Curricula to be Devoted to Liberal Studies

Two-thirds of BFM feel that students should be encouraged to engage in liberal studies but rarely at the expense of technical parts of their curricula. Another one-fourth would go farther and encourage liberal studies even at the expense of some technical courses.

Current AACSB accreditation standards call for 40-60% of course work to be devoted to studies other than business, economics, and administration. Unfortunately, the survey instrument did not provide BFM with options that would fit this standard precisely. A plurality of about 40% of BFM indicated a preference for 36-50% of the curriculum being devoted to liberal arts courses and nearly 30% preferred 26-35%. Of course, if normal requirements in economics were added to the 26-35%, this might well constitute compliance with the 40% minimum advocated by AACSB. Nearly one-fourth of BFM preferred that 25% or less of the curriculum be devoted to liberal arts; about 5% preferred more than 50%.

In most of the nine professions, the proportion of the various curricula to be devoted to liberal arts that was preferred by a plurality

of respondents was lower than that preferred by the plurality of BFM. Only in journalism and nursing did the plurality of respondents prefer as high a percentage as did the plurality of BFM. There has been a marked shift in all nine professions between 1958 and 1976 in the direction of preferring that a smaller proportion of the curriculum be devoted to liberal arts courses. In every profession, the percentage of respondents who preferred more liberal studies than was preferred by a plurality of their peers was smaller in 1976 than it was in 1958. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who preferred that a ~~larger~~^{smaller} proportion of curricula be devoted to liberal studies than that preferred by a plurality of their peers was larger in 1976 than in 1958. In business, those preferring that 50% or more of the curriculum be devoted to liberal studies constituted about 15% of the respondents in 1958 and only about 5% in 1976. Similarly, 25% or less was preferred by 26% of BFM in 1976 compared with only 7% in 1958.

Organizing the Liberal Arts Component

Since the accreditation standards of AACSB state that the undergraduate school of business should concentrate its professional courses in the last two years of a four-year program, it is perhaps surprising that less than a majority of BFM responses favored patterns for providing the liberal arts component that imply compliance with this standard. Only about 40% of BFM prefer making the first two years of college heavily liberal arts and building thereon appropriate specialized curricula to whatever period of time is appropriate, and only about 11% prefer that all liberal arts courses be taken during the first two years. To be sure, the language in which these choices were phrased might account to some extent for the

disinclination on the part of BFM to elect these choices even though they are the ones most clearly consistent with AACSB standards. On the other hand, 42% of BFM prefer to spread liberal arts courses evenly throughout the four-year curriculum or to permit students to take them at their own convenience.

The concept of permitting the student free choice among all liberal arts courses is far less popular among BFM than is the concept that students should be required to include several areas in their studies in the liberal arts. Only about 8% of BFM favor the former while 73% favor the latter. Nearly all of the remaining 19% of BFM opted to require students to take a prescribed set of courses, each having direct relevance to the specialized field. The situation was similar in the other eight professional fields.

Views of Liberal Arts Attributed to
Others by Business Faculty

On the somewhat dubious assumption that the attitudes toward liberal arts held by BFM would be influenced by their perceptions of the views of the president and of the views of administrators and faculty in liberal arts and in business, McGrath and his associates asked their populations to indicate their perceptions of the attitudes these categories of personnel held regarding the relative value of liberal studies and regarding the general nature of the liberal arts components. The same items were necessarily included in the 1976 survey, and the data failed to reveal any significant changes over the 18-year period. BFM tended to attribute to their own administrators and fellow faculty members attitudes that are less favorable toward liberal studies than the attitudes that they held themselves. For example, 27% of 1976 BFM favor requiring more liberal

arts even at the expense of some technical courses, but only about 7% attribute this view to others in business. Similarly, only about 16% BFM prefer that the liberal arts component consist of courses directly relevant to their special curricula, but about 37% attribute this view to their own colleagues. Interestingly, BFM consider their own views to be closer to those of the president than are those of their colleagues. Naturally, the views attributed to liberal arts faculty and administrators are strongly pro-liberal arts.

Conclusions

The most obvious conclusion from the preponderance of the data presented in this paper is that while BFM cling to the notion that liberal/general education should be at the university level, they are less favorably disposed toward this component of their curricula than were their counterparts some twenty years ago. BFM surveyed in 1976 were less likely to agree with statements expressing attitudes favorable to the liberal arts and less likely to disagree with statements unfavorable to the liberal arts. Furthermore, greater proportions of BFM favor a smaller percentage of curriculum time to be devoted to liberal/general studies, and smaller proportions are disposed to require their undergraduate students to take courses in those disciplines that do not appear to contribute directly to the study and practices of business. This latter point suggests a perhaps less obvious conclusion; namely, that while BFM are quite strongly disposed to establish firm course requirements in the interest of educating undergraduates in the professional skills and attributes essential for successful careers in business, they more often feel that the general/liberal education of their students might best be individually prescribed through the advisory

process or even left to the judgment of the student. Of course, this interpretation of the data assumes that BFM have given sufficient thought to the content and organization of their curricula to have arrived logically at the choice of individual prescription for the liberal/general component. An alternative explanation may be that sizeable proportions of BFM prefer to treat the liberal/general component with benign neglect. Given the state of the academic reward system, the difficulty of arriving at satisfactory curricular agreements with faculties in general studies, and the many other demands on faculty time, the alternative interpretation seems quite attractive.

TABLE 1
Numbers of Schools and Faculty Members
Participating in Surveys,
1958 and 1976

Professional Fields	McGrath Study (1958)	Current Study (1976)	
		Schools	Faculty
Agriculture	824	28	1033
Business Administration	277	65	742
Education	582	148	1284
Engineering	595	51	800
Home Economics	18	27	585
Journalism	201	25	163
Music	351	35	261
Nursing	318	44	689
Pharmacy	96	33	391
TOTAL	3262	456	5948

NOTE: The McGrath Study did not report the number of participating schools.

TABLE 2

Index of Favorable Attitudes toward the
Liberal Arts by Professional Fields

Field	1958 Study		1976 Study		Diff. in Index 1956-76
	Number	Index	Number	Index	
Nursing	318	19.25	574	17.42	-1.83
Journalism	201	19.01	144	17.88	-1.13
Business	277	18.39	495	15.78	-2.61
Education	582	18.35	859	15.83	-2.52
Pharmacy	96	17.49	349	15.49	-2.00
Home Economics	18	17.17	512	15.88	-1.29
Agriculture	824	16.82	1012	15.38	-1.44
Engineering	595	16.18	748	14.23	-1.95
Music	351	16.18	170	16.38	0.20

TABLE 3

Percentage of Faculty in Various Professions Agreeing/Disagreeing
with Statements Relative to the Values of Liberal Studies

Statement	Ag		Bus		Ed		Eng		H.E.		Jour		Mus		Nurs		Phar	
	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No	Agree Yes	No
No differences in purposes of liberal and specialized education	6	88	5	86	4	89	7	85	6	88	5	91	3	90	3	93	3	88
Values of liberal arts unattainable	11	57	8	68	8	67	15	56	6	67	10	71	5	76	4	80	9	62
Combination of liberal arts and specialized courses destroys values of both	9	82	5	88	4	86	9	83	3	91	3	93	5	84	6	86	11	79
Liberal values as well achieved through technical courses	17	60	15	61	19	60	21	55	15	62	10	73	16	56	9	78	12	63
Specialized courses are best for technical students	30	55	30	47	32	49	35	48	26	49	29	54	41	38	21	61	40	41
(1958)	23		21		14		28		17		25		42		19		31	
Liberal arts courses better in developing broad intellectual interests	58	27	63	22	59	25	47	34	54	32	75	12	75	15	59	24	65	21
People with both liberal and specialized training better off vocationally	72	18	76	13	78	10	68	19	82	6	89	5	84	7	81	7	73	12
Technically trained people lack imagination and broad perspectives	50	32	56	28	55	25	44	36	58	21	75	12	68	16	73	10	54	27
14 (1958)	60		77		72		57		78		77		70		80		72	

Table 4

Liberal Arts Courses Which Would Be Required by BFM

Course	Percent Who Would Require		Percent Who Would Have enrollment optional	
	1976	1958	1976	1958
English Composition	96	98	3	-
Economics	85	85	4	2
Mathematics	85	78	5	6
History	46	67	23	6
Speech	43	49	32	19
Literature	40	52	32	14
Psychology	28	46	30	17
Political Science	26	53	34	12
Philosophy	13	42	47	19
Sociology	23	35	33	25
Physiology	-	3	-	68
Biology	15	12	44	50
Physics	7	12	50	47
Chemistry	8	11	50	49
Religion	7	14	64	55
Art	8	7	63	69
Music	6	5	66	68
Foreign Language	4	20	66	41